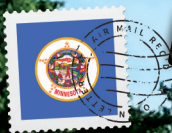


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Paul Bunyan & Babe the Blue Ox. Bemidji's Famous Roadside Attraction.
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The Birthplace of Spring Break

I was eight years old when I received the largest Christmas present of my life. In literal terms, the largest. Housed in an imposing cardboard box, dwarfing the tree it sat adjacent to—a merry mystery in the making.

I must've stared at that box for a month. Wondering, dreaming, imaging what could possibly be hiding within those corrugated walls of cardboard. I gave it a few nudges—in passing—to get an idea of the weight, and that bad boy was *heavy*. Time was my albatross and I'd just have to wait it out. To make matters worse, my sister had an equally handsome Christmas carton waiting for her. *Lame*.

And then it arrived: the morning of the great unboxing. I was down the stairs so quickly that my pajama pants nearly burnt off upon re-entry to the family room atmosphere. Smack in the middle of my “no shirts ever” phase, I had woken up ready for action.

My dad made us open our Bertha-boxes last, simultaneously. My sister and I raced into those boxes, hoping to secure an extra second of joy that the other could never regain—and we were met with an awkward, anti-surprise. We opened boxes full of our own clothes. Summer clothes.

I was miffed. How could this happen? Why would dad do this? How did I not notice my clothes were missing? Dad cut through the confusion by telling us the gift came with an explanation. We decided to hear him out before we reported him to the Better Business Bureau.

Dad killed it. The boxes were packed with our summer clothes, because we'd need them for our first family trip to sunny, fantastic Florida! What had seemed like a nosedive into a Christmas disaster was quickly turned around by this unexpectedly awesome opportunity.

A new clock had been set: the countdown to my very first spring break, my first flight—and my first visit to my grandparents' condo in Fort Myers Beach, Florida. We started prepping for the trip almost immediately; shopping, packing, planning—I distinctly remember going through a punch-card-amount of tanning bed visits.

Shortly before the trip, a couple of boxes arrived in the mail. This was the early 1990s, so a package in the mail was a treat, it meant a mail order was coming to fruition. These identical boxes were markedly smaller than the boxes opened months prior, but they didn't disap-



point. Each box contained a KOSS cassette player and a pair of headphones—entertainment for our flights. I went to work recording songs off the radio, curating the perfect mix for my upcoming expedition.

For whatever reason, those three hours in the sky felt like a week. The excitement provided by my in-flight meal and soda was no competition for the show provided by the oval window I sat next to. I sank into my playlist; nose firmly pressed against that plastic portal to the world.

We stepped off the plane and into a new world. Palm trees, geckos, the ocean! Florida might as well have been another planet; I was blown away for a week straight. My dad had been to the island countless times before, so he was in his element. He enthusiastically chauffeured us around the island, sharing this magi-

cal place with us—I could tell it was important to him. It marked my first visit to restaurants and stores that I'd visit in subsequent trips.

That trip cemented the concept of spring break into my brain. We certainly didn't go to Florida every year, but we *did* do something. A few days at the Holidome an hour away, A road trip to see relatives in Brainerd—something to break up the monotony of winter. On a couple of occasions, I've used Spring Break to double-down on winter, heading to the mountains with my snowboard.

Whatever it is, it's something to look forward to. We're experiencing a strange reality but surely there are safe, realistic ways to satisfy our want to wander. Adventure begins at gas stations as often as airports—it's out there waiting. ■

One Man's Cult Is Another Man's Culture

What is a cult? Who becomes a cult leader and what is their appeal? The lines are not always as clear-cut as one would like.

Cults usually have a central leader whose followers have been drawn to serve that individual's driving needs, the most obvious of which are power, money, sex, and fame.

Notable of twentieth century cults was Charles Manson and his murderous following, and Jim Jones and his flock seeking a "socialist paradise" in Guyana. In addition to the murder of Congressman Lee Ryan, Jones was responsible for the deaths of 918 followers and his suicide.

David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX, believed the end of the world was near, while Koresh also held, in a broad definition of "spiritual," that *all* women were his spiritual wives. An ATF attempted raid led to the death of four agents and six Branch Davidians, and thence a 51-day standoff, ending on April 19, when the FBI, with tanks and .50 caliber rifles arrived. Seventy-six died.

In 1997, former professor Marshall Apple-

white, founder of Heaven's Gate, preached that after shedding their earthly bonds, he and his followers would leave on a spaceship as the Hale-Bopp comet sped by. On March 26, Applewhite and 38 followers, clad in black sweats and Nike Decade sneakers, shared a cyanide, pineapple juice and vodka toast and "graduated."

Deep in the Depression there was Huey P. Long, the "Kingfish," Louisiana governor and US Senator. Folksy, flamboyant, autocratic, he held advanced ideas for social reform, welfare, sweeping infrastructure upgrades. He also kept bodyguards close and used intimidation; he fired the legally-elected lieutenant governor, replacing him with chosen successors to do his bidding in Washington. On September 10, 1935, Long was assassinated by the son of a man he had harmed. He was 42. Not strictly a cult leader, but draped in a cultist's mantle of charisma, control, and violence.

On the distaff side is Aimée Semple McPherson (1890-1944). "Sister Aimée," or "Sister," was a Pentecostal Evangelist who

founded the International Church of the Four-square Gospel. McPherson aimed to make Christianity central to American life, holding faith-healing demonstrations that drew tens of thousands. "Darwinism undermines morality," she asserted, and supported William Jennings Bryan in the 1925 Scopes trial.

When she died of a Seconal overdose in 1944, it took 11 trucks to haul \$50,000 worth of flowers to her gravesite at Forest Lawn Memorial Park. Today, ICFG still maintains "over 8.9 million members in over 90,000 churches across 146 nations."

Is "cult" only in the eye of the non-believer? All the individuals above, whatever their outcome, evinced tremendous, narcissistic energy clothed in a magnetic charisma, that drew receptive followers into their orbit. It's easy to say, "Oh, I'd never..." But anyone, from whatever background or degree of education, can be swayed by personalities that mirror their needs, perhaps not to the degree of total submission, or, perhaps we've just been lucky enough not to meet the key combination. Yet. ■



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STREAMING WARS: HBO MAX



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We've covered Netflix and Hulu both in this multi-column streaming wars piece. As I mentioned before, Netflix and Hulu both are probably the first major streaming services that really drew people in. HBO has gone through numerous rebirths from the original pay-per-view channel to HBO NOW, HBO GO and now HBO MAX.

The newest version has plenty to watch—from the classic shows like *The Sopranos* to even newer ones like *Search Party*, which originally aired on a previous channel. Let's dive into what I think are some of the best finds on HBO MAX!

SEARCH PARTY

This was by far the show of the year for me. Originally on TBS, *Search Party* was picked up for a third season on HBO MAX. The satirical dark comedy takes numerous turns throughout each season but starts when Dory, an NYU grad who is looking for purpose in her life, realizes that someone she barely knew from college has gone missing. Obsessed with finding her, Dory and her friends go on a journey throughout the city that never sleeps, hoping to find their missing acquaintance, Chantal.

The show recently was renewed for a fifth season and is by far one of the best things I watched last year. Performances by the main cast are sublime, hilarious and had me laughing from start to finish. A true testament to what dark and satirical comedy can and should be.

THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I'll be honest in saying that I have not watched it—however, I have yet to hear one negative thing about it. There have been countless friends and family members that have told me to watch this show. Part mys-

tery drama and part dark comedy, this show starring Kaley Cuoco was originally a book by Chris Bohjalian. It is about an American flight attendant, who is also a reckless alcoholic, wakes up after hooking up with someone in a strange hotel room. The show begins when she discovers the dead body of a man, who was on her previous flight, lying next to her.

While the show is based on a book, it's already been renewed for a second season after critics praised Kaley's performance. Normally the book is better but I've had numerous people tell me the show is the better of the two.

SUCCESSION

Another home run for HBO is *Succession*. I remember when the first season came out in 2018, my roommate at the time started it not really knowing what we were getting into. Every single Sunday, it was our tradition to watch it because of how absolutely captivating it was. It centers around the Roy family, owners of the Waystar RoyCo organization, which is a global media and hospital-

ity empire. The patriarch of the family, Logan Roy (played by the incredible Brian Cox) is mean, ruthless, and conniving as he pits his children against each other to see who will eventually take over for him when he retires.

This drama has moments of dark comedy but overall is about a dysfunctional family that will make your own look like the Brady Bunch.

VEEP

An old series, sure, but nevertheless a fantastic one. *VEEP*, starring the incomparable Julie Louis-Dreyfus is about the fictional first female Vice President named Selina Meyer and the constant mishaps that she and her office get into. Perhaps you aren't a super big politics fan, no worries. There is still something to enjoy about this show. The creators never reveal what political party she is a part of—which is brilliant. Due to this, they are allowed to play to the idiocracies of both parties. It's by far one of the funniest shows I've ever seen and I probably am due for a rewatch of it in the coming weeks. ■



Julia Louis-Dreyfus at the FYC for HBO's series *VEEP* 6th Season at the ATAS Saban Media Center on May 25, 2017 in North Hollywood, CA. Photo courtesy of BigStock/kathclick

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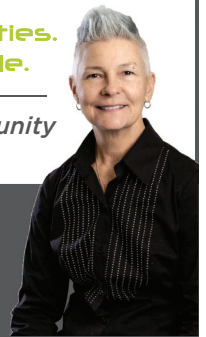
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Photo by Louis Zum

Singing their way through 40 seasons of celebrating diversity and using music “as a way to transform, educate, and heal,” the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus remains devoted to their mission: *Gay Men Building Community Through Music*.

It’s been more than a year since the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus left the stage for the last time. A live, in-person stage, that is. Chorus members have banded together to deliver digital concerts—giving their fans new, albeit makeshift performances to hold them over until COVID restrictions allow for in-person performances.

Daniel Hodges is entering his fourth season performing with Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus, and his third year serving as a board member. “I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t [singing]. I started singing in church as a kid,” Hodges told me about his relationship with singing. “I’m a choir kid through and through. I’ve been in choirs my whole life, all the way through undergrad, even in graduate school,” he continued.

I was curious of the duties carried out by the board, and Hodges’ role within the board. Hodges told me, “The board is responsible [sic] for the oversight and some of the high-level decision making for the organization. I’m specifically the chair of the development committee.” “My job is to help raise money for the organization,” Hodges continued, “And unlike a lot of boards, the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus Board is very much hands on.”

Daniel comes well-suited for his role. By day, Daniel is a nonprofit fundraiser for an educational organization. “I’ve been in non-profit fundraising for about ten years.”

COVID-19 has put a damper on live performances, but it hasn’t stifled the creativity or the ingenuity of the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus. “We’ve done a couple of virtual concerts,” Hodges told me. “We did one small one at the end of the summer and then one of our holiday concerts was virtual.” “Right now, [we’re] preparing for our spring virtual concert.”

In June, the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus

will perform their annual Pride Concert—on a virtual stage.

Coordinating a virtual chorus might seem like an impossible task, but the guys took it one step at a time. “On Tuesday nights we divide up into different breakout rooms, into our voice parts...we have great section leaders for each of the voice parts,” Hodges tells me of the chorus’ current practice routine. “...guys will take turns singing [each] part because you can’t sing together in a Zoom, because of the delays and whatnot.” “It’s not perfect, but it’s definitely been better than what I expected. And better than nothing.”

If you missed the virtual concerts you can watch them for free, on demand at tcgmc.org. You can show your support by donating to the chorus, patronizing the chorus’ community partners, or by signing up to volunteer at a fundraising event or during a concert weekend. Now more than ever, community support can deliver a meaningful impact toward sustaining the future of the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus. ■

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The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year

BY KASSIDY TARALA

Summer is finally around the corner, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources shares how you can make the most of the short season.



Minnesota is known for its summer, and for good reason. Though the season is short-lived (*way* too short-lived, if you ask me), we Minnesotans sure know how to make the most of it. From our seemingly endless lakes to the beautiful North Shore to long bike rides around the cities, a Minnesota summer is unmatched.

As things remain uncertain yet, as the pandemic continues on despite an increase in accessibility to the vaccine, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is fully committed to making sure that Minnesotans can fully enjoy the summer season, as it is intended to be.

The colors of summer draw in visitors each year, and locals enjoy soaking in the sunshine among our beautiful native plants. Which is why the DNR suggests checking out the many parks and trails around the state to witness some of Earth's greatest gifts: wildflowers.

"Minnesota State Parks and Trails are home to a beautiful and diverse array of wildflowers. Some tower above you, some require bending at the knees to get a good look. Some will shock you with their vibrant colors, while others will reel you in with their intricacy. The timing of their blooms varies with the weather and where you are in the state," says Interpretive Naturalist Jenni Webster. "In general, you can see the best variety of flowering forest plants from early May to early June. Prairie wildflowers usually put on their best show from early August to early September. Minnesota state park trails will allow you to get a great view without ever leaving the path."

"Wildflowers are part of an ever-changing state park palette that reveals something new with each visit," Webster adds.

For those looking for a side of adventure to their wildflower viewing, Webster recommends taking the Bog Walk at Lake Bemidji State Park.

"If you visit in mid-May, you'll be treated to a carpet of white flowers





courtesy of the Labrador tea plant. Take a trip in late June for a glimpse of showy lady's slippers, or at the end of July for a chance to spot a dragon's mouth orchid," Webster says.

Another great option is the Hiking Club Trail at Rice Lake State Park. Step down the trail in early May for a forest floor brimming with spring blooms like trout lily, hepatica, and spring beauty. And if you return to the same trail in August, you will see prairie flowers like rattlesnake master, black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, blazing star, and butterfly weed.

For socially distanced activities, the DNR has several on-your-own options, including outdoor exhibits at parks and along trails. "Interpretive exhibits, highlighting natural and cultural resources, are located throughout our parks and trails system at overlooks and other popular sites," Webster says. "Participate in the Aquatic Quest geocaching program and collect cards highlighting Minnesota's aquatic resources.

"Got kids, or are you a kid at heart? Print out a Junior Park Naturalist book at home and complete on your park visit," Webster says.

Whatever activity suits you, Webster says to always plan ahead. "Make reservations and buy your permits in advance. If you buy a vehicle permit online, record your confirmation number and place it on your car's dashboard," Webster says. "Be prepared. Bring your own water and snacks. Follow the rules. Follow federal, state, and MDH/DNR guidelines. Observe cleaning protocols, follow directional signage and practice social distancing—even outdoors."

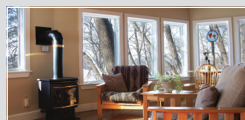
The DNR is just beginning to plan its summer programming, so be sure to check back in April or May at mndnr.gov/ptcalendar. ■



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Minnesota's Birthplace Does Not Sit 'Still'

BY MIKE MARCOTTE

Stillwater creates a perfect staycation destination only minutes from the cities.

As the host of Minnesota's first territorial convention in 1848, Stillwater is considered Minnesota's birthplace. The town is actually older than Minneapolis.

Nestled on the St. Croix River about 25 miles east of downtown Minneapolis, Stillwater was recently voted as having one of the top 10 Best Small Town Food Scenes by *USA Today*.

Between the restaurants, you'll find an eclectic group of antique shops plus other shopping experiences showcasing makers from Minnesota and Wisconsin.

For those from the Twin Cities, Stillwater makes for a simple, yet fulfilling staycation destination.

I recently teamed up with Discover Stillwater, the city's visitors bureau, to showcase their best, whether you're visiting from Minneapolis or Miami.

Where to eat: Nacho Mama's

312 Main St. S. • www.nachomamasmn.com

When I asked my Facebook fans what they love about Stillwater, Nacho's Mama's was the most popular response. Located right on Main Street, the eclectic vibe inside will instantly put a smile on your face.

The menu mixes authentic and modern Mexican dishes with a twist. You'll find a hint of the Caribbean on the menu, too.

The Nacho Mama's Nachos, on the appetizers menu, is more like a dinner entree. For \$15, you'll get a platter full of chips with pico de gallo, guacamole, lettuce, multiple types of melted cheese, sour cream, and your choice of beef, chicken, pulled pork, or a Tijuana cocktail (marinated shrimp). For two people, these nachos and a couple margaritas is all you need for a great dinner.

I also ordered The Three Amigos off the specialty entree menu. It



Photo courtesy of BigStock/Brian Kenney

features three stuffed bell peppers — the green has shredded beef and rice, the red has shredded chicken, black beans and smoked gouda, and my favorite, the yellow, has shrimp, crab, and jalapeño popper cream cheese.

As for other recommended restaurants, check out Phil's Tara Hideaway, located outside of downtown along Highway 36. Situated in a cozy log cabin, the Tara offers a Greek-inspired menu with daily-sourced fish.

You also can't go wrong with LoLo American Kitchen, right along Main Street. And inside the Water Street Inn, Charlie's Restaurant offers weekly four-course Wine Dinners. Each course is paired with a glass of wine, and it costs less than \$50 per person.

Where to shop: Smith + Trade Mercantile

229 Main St. S. • www.smithandtrade.com

Fodor's Travel included Stillwater in its list of the 10 Best Antiquing Towns in the United States, but there's plenty more shopping in town. Stillwater is home to over 50 independent owner-operated stores, including Smith + Trade Mercantile, which opened on Main Street in May 2019.

Smith + Trade features the work of 60 artisans from Minnesota and Wisconsin, and once they move into the storefront next door later in 2021, they will be able to host around 90 artists.

From leather work to jewelry, wall art to glass, Smith + Trade offers a wide array of home decor, with no more than two or three artists in the same aesthetic.

Placards around the store feature the information for every artist, and you're able to scan a QR code that takes you to their page on Smith + Trade's website. Many of the artists can be found in the store working on their craft, and all do custom orders.

The Mercantile offers classes, including cigar rolling and bourbon



tastings, along with live music. Owners hope to get those activities going again as COVID restrictions ease.

As for other shopping experiences, Reclaiming Beautiful is giving new life to furniture and other home decor. They're open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays a bit up the hill from downtown.

Because you deserve a treat: Candyland 212 Main St. N. • www.candylandstore.com

Every true Minnesotan knows about Candyland. The first location, in downtown Saint Paul, opened in 1932. It got its start by selling fudge and popcorn.

It's that popcorn that's a big part of Candyland's success today. They are well known for their Chicago Mix, a combination of seasoned popcorn, caramel popcorn, and cheese popcorn. The Chicago Mix has been a staple on the Candyland menu since 1988.

The Stillwater location opened in the summer of 2012 right along Main Street. Beyond the popcorn, you'll find hand-dipped chocolates made from scratch, along with a wide assortment of candy. You don't have to walk into the store to catch Candyland's sweet, sweet smell.

Because you deserve a treat (and it's Summer): Nelson's Ice Cream 920 Olive St. W. • www.nelsonsicecream.biz

Although it's up the hill from Main Street, and only open during the warm weather months, Nelson's Ice Cream is worth the visit. It was voted as one of the five best ice cream shops in Minnesota.

The building that houses Nelson's dates back to 1923, but the reason why Nelson's is so popular didn't catch on until the 1960s. They serve very, very generous scoops of ice cream.

More than 40 flavors of ice cream are available, and you'll also find a line on warm summer nights. When I visited to chat with the family who owns Nelson's, the line went out the door, down the block, and wrapped around the corner. Nelson's owners tell me they'll go through 450 gallons of ice cream on a busy day.

Heads up if you visit: they only accept cash. Depending on weather, Nelson's is typically open from the beginning of April until Halloween.

Down on Main Street, Leo's Grill & Malt Shop is another fantastic choice if you're looking for a sweet treat. They're open year-round and offer a full menu. For a perfect summer's evening, walk up to the Leo's window, order yourself a strawberry malt, and enjoy it along the banks of the St. Croix River.

Where to stay: Hotel Crosby 232 Main St. N. • www.hotelcrosby.com

With its close proximity to the Twin Cities, Stillwater is the perfect spot for a weekend staycation. The town of 20,000 residents is home to multiple boutique hotels, including Hotel Crosby, located along Main Street.

The Crosby features 55 guest rooms, including five suites. I stayed in a one bedroom suite that featured a sectional couch, oversized bean bag chair, and patio.

A few rooms include a full kitchen, including ovens, refrigerators, and plenty of counter space if you want to entertain.

My room, on the third floor, was near an outdoor hot tub, which was open during the winter. The Crosby also features an onsite spa and fitness center. Plus, they offer complimentary parking for hotel guests.

Whether you stay overnight at the Crosby or not, a major highlight is MatchStick Restaurant & Spirits, located in the Hotel's lobby. MatchStick boasts more than 700 rare and unique spirits, which are displayed behind a gorgeous bar. They also offer wine, local beers, and a selection of farm to table menu items.

What else you can do...

Stillwater sits on the banks of the St. Croix River, which provides opportunities for you to get on the water, whether you have a boat or not. The Discover Stillwater website has an On the Water section featuring unique opportunities, including gondola rides, paddleboard rentals, and boat excursions.

Make sure to visit the revamped Stillwater Lift Bridge, which is now exclusively for pedestrian and bike traffic. If you're looking for some exercise, the Lift Bridge is part of a new 4.7 mile Loop Trail that brings you across the St. Croix Crossing Bridge, also known as the new Highway 36 bridge that goes into Wisconsin.

If you hit a rainy day, stop by the Stillwater Public Library. The restored Carnegie Library is a site to behold and its position up the hill offers a gorgeous view of the river valley.

Thanks to Discover Stillwater for their help planning Mike's staycation. Plan your trip to Stillwater by visiting discoverstillwater.com. Read more of Mike's travel guides on his website, givemethemike.com. ■



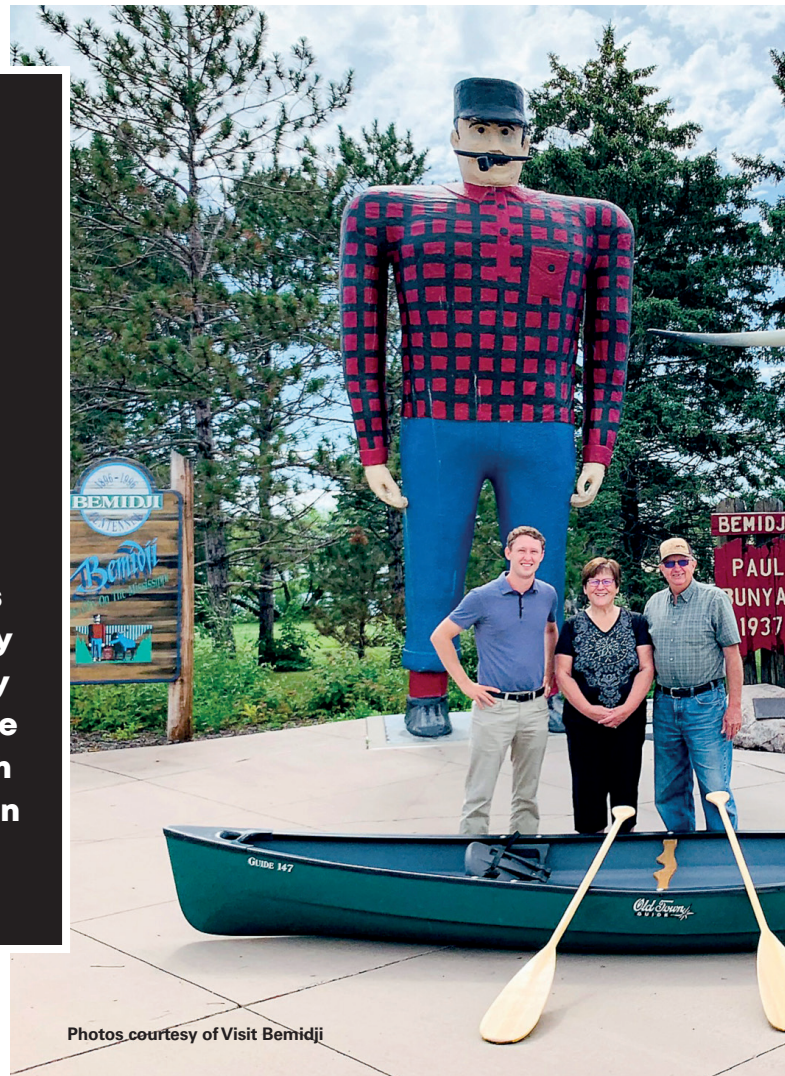
Photo courtesy of BigStock/Sandra Burn



Delightfully Lost In Bemidji

BY RYAN PATCHIN

A gem of Northern Minnesota, and a *Lavender* standby, is Bemidji. The city has fewer than 20,000 residents sharing nearly twenty square miles—meaning it's socially distant by nature. And they're open. I spoke with Visit Bemidji's Executive Director Josh Peterson and asked him what Bemidji has in store for 2021.



Photos courtesy of Visit Bemidji

What are the major draws to area? What brings people to Bemidji?

Bemidji is a summer destination that ranks #1 in a few key attractions. Starting with the most photographed roadside attraction: the statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, and the life-sized statues which stand on the shores of Lake Bemidji, which have called that same location home since 1937. Paul's height is 18 feet, and he weighs two-and-a-half tons. Babe weighs five tons, and his horns have a span of 14 feet. He was added next to Paul in 1939.

Another Bemidji #1 is the fact that Bemidji is the First City on the Mississippi. You can find the start of the mighty Mississippi just 26 miles southwest of Bemidji. There, you can walk across the source of the river. Itasca State Park offers something for everyone from bicycle and Pontoon rentals to educational opportunities. Lake Itasca and its park offers the perfect afternoon excursion when you plan your stay in Bemidji.

What's new for Spring/Summer 2021?

After a year of limited offerings due to the pandemic, Bemidji is excited to bring back summer events. While summer events may look a bit different, celebrating summer is what Bemidji is known for. Starting with the 77th Annual Bemidji Jaycees Water Carnival, which runs from June 30th – July 5th, 2021. This 4th of July celebration includes everything from carnival rides and food to parades and the largest fireworks display in northern Minnesota. July 7th brings with it the return of Mississippi

Music, where each Wednesday night local and regional artists perform their original compositions at the Bemidji Waterfront. Bemidji also offers a large Art-in-the-Park event in mid-July, featuring artists from all over the Midwest. The spirit of competition comes alive during the 15th Annual Lake Bemidji Dragon Boat Festival. It's not just about Dragon Boat racing: festival activities include great food, music, kids' activities, a parade of teams, cultural performances, camaraderie, and much more all along the shores of beautiful Lake Bemidji.

How has COVID affected tourism in the area?

While COVID greatly affected the tourism industry, Bemidji fared extremely well, because in northern Minnesota we are naturally socially distanced. Being that our specialty is outdoor recreation, Bemidji offers access to solace. It's where you can be one with nature in the "Lost 40," or go for a hike at the Lake Bemidji State Park Bog Walk or enjoy a night of camping in the Chippewa National Forest. Even though tourism for our area was down slightly the past year, Bemidji remains to be a safe option for those who visit.

What are your recommendations for Bemidji or the surrounding area?

When you plan your trip to the Bemidji area, you'll find that you can personalize your lodging options. Whether you stay at one of our nine

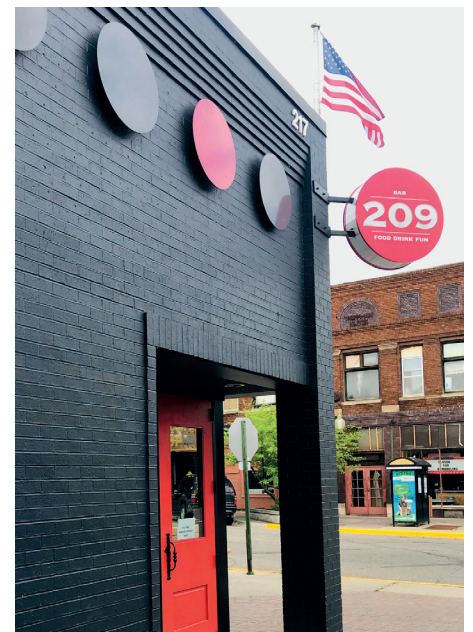


beautiful hotels or one of our unique resorts, we can guarantee that you'll want to come back for more. You can plan a stay in a treehouse cabin at Kohl's Resort or rent a cabin on the shores of Lake Bemidji at Rutger's Birchmont Lodge. Locations offer amenities such as watercraft rentals, dining, and access to personalized adventures. Bemidji is also home to amazing stories through its history. Bemidji is set in the heart of Native American culture and is proud to have its Native American heritage on display throughout the city.

Recommendations for summer '21? Community activities?

Bemidji is rich with arts and culture. Whether it is visual, or the performing arts, Bemidji has art on display everywhere you look. The most obvious is when you walk around downtown Bemidji and see massive works of art on display as part of the Bemidji Sculpture Walk. Bemidji is also home to the Water Art Center which showcases work

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from artists from around the world. If you enjoy stage productions, you can take in a show at the Paul Bunyan Playhouse at the historic Chief Theater in downtown Bemidji. The playhouse is the oldest, professional summer stock company in Minnesota, and draws actors from across the state, region, and country. While in downtown Bemidji you can check out our great food district—all within walking distance. You can find food from all over the world, such as fine Italian dining at Tutto Bene, the best in Thai food at Tara, an upscale breakfast at Red Stu, or an all-American meal at Bar 209. Bemidji Brewing, also located in historic downtown, features many different beers but is known for its award-winning German Blonde Beer.

Go to www.visitbemidji.com to learn more about Bemidji and to start planning your visit! ■



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North Shore Quarterly Cook County Calmness

BY RYAN PATCHIN

Springtime in Minnesota is something to behold—a true eco-awakening. There’s a lot of winter to undo, and that process can be a visual treat for those who know where to look.



Point your car north for a few hours and you’ll find yourself firmly planted in a different Minnesota. Cook County is a *Lavender* standby and offers a brilliant vantage point for witnessing a Minnesota Spring—no airport required. I spoke with Visit Cook County’s Marketing and Public Relations Director, Kjersti Vick to see what spring 2021 has in store.

“In the springtime, one of the kind of crazy, unique things about our geographical location is that we have the Sawtooth Mountain range that plunges from the interior of the boundary waters down into Lake Superior.” Vick told me that spring reaches the North Shore later than it does the Twin Cities. “April and May is when the snow is melting up here and our waterfalls are just incredible,” Vick told me of their delayed spring.

“We do a Waterfall Wednesdays campaign that just highlights all the cool, unique waterfalls and where they are in that status of spring break-up.” Visit Cook County’s website also posts information throughout the season about pop-up waterfalls, which tend to flow later in the season.

For the sportsperson, Cook County shines bright in the springtime. “Once we roll into the month of May, people start to think about the fishing season...the walleyes are very aggressively feeding at that time, so fishing is one of our big [attractions].”

Gravel riding has been growing in popularity amongst cyclists, and Cook County is well positioned for the latest two-wheel fad. Vick told me that Cook County has “hundreds of miles of gravel





Photos shared with permission by Visit Cook County

trails—and we have a couple of designated routes that are more biker friendly.” The area also plays host to some major cycling events. “Memorial Day weekend, the Le Grand du Nord is a gravel cycling race and that is scheduled right now to occur,” Vick said. COVID-19 protocols have been implemented to ensure a safe race environment. “...rather than having a mass start, they’re going to stage the starts,” according to Vick. The Lutsen 99er mountain bike race is also set to run, in June.

For those who prefer a walking pace, you’re covered too. I was surprised to learn about Cook County’s wild growing, unfarmed blueberry burgeon. “We have the ‘biggest blueberry contest’ on the Gunflint Trail,” Vick said with a smile. Blueberries, gathered throughout the summer, are brought into local, participating stores for an official weigh-in. Largest blueberry gets a prize. “...it’s just kind of a fun, low-key event where we encourage people to go out into the woods.”

Ninety percent of Cook County’s 3,000 acres is public forest land; they were socially distant before it was cool. “We have a lot of



Continued on page 26



trails and lots of people come up here to get away from everything and, you know, just have some time alone.” Exploring is always open in Cook County—it’s the planned events that have seen a fluid dynamic over the past year.

“I think that we have become masters of the phrase ‘pivoting.’ We’re getting really good at coming up with different scenarios, like if this happens, then we move here. If this happens and we move here—we have a group of very thoughtful leaders in our community.” Vick told me that they’re “working really [closely] with our state and local officials to make sure that the local business community knows how to proceed forward and how to be nimble on their feet.”

A grand example of said nimbleness is Lutsen Mountain Ski Resort. “They have come up with a very comprehensive way of managing groups of people at the mountain,” accord-

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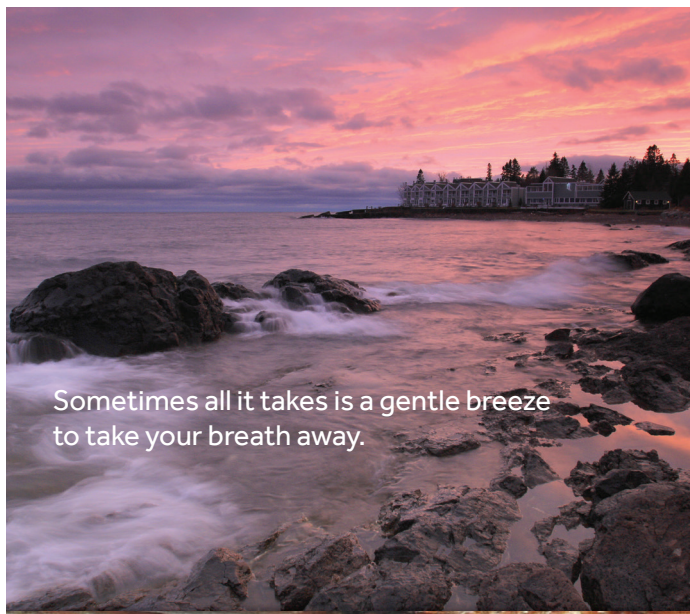
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ing to Vick. The resort has made calculated decisions, “based on the temperature, the demands, the interest, and what the weather is doing—so that they can be ready to have [sic] ten different plans in place for what the weather is doing and the demands of that day.” Their success has been noted and “has been kind of replicated by some of our other events and venues so that they’re doing the same kind of monitoring.”

I asked Vick about her personal recommendations for visiting Cook County. The Gunflint Trail’s “Wet Your Paddle” program offers an hour of free paddling, through various resorts along the trail, and Vick tells me it’s a must. She also suggests hiking to waterfalls during their peak—and of course, blueberries. “Even if you only pick a handful of blueberries, there’s something really satisfying about picking something that’s been kissed by the sun.”

Check out www.visitcookcounty.com to see a full, up-to-date list of events and resources for planning your trip to Cook County. ■



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“Katy Has Two Grandpas”



Katy, an imaginative elementary-aged girl with a speech impediment, is thrilled when her teacher announces Grandparents Day. Her Grampas are the best and she cannot wait to bring them to school – until she finds out that she is supposed to introduce them to the whole class. Nervous that her classmates will make fun of her speech impediment and then hurt when her teacher assumes that Katy is mispronouncing “Grandma” when she says gushes about bringing her “Grampa and Grampa” to school, Katy is suddenly not so sure that she wants to participate in Grandparents Day after all.

Author Julie Schanke Lyford came up with the idea for *Katy Has Two Grampas* after realizing that there were no children’s books featuring gay grandparents. “Our family owned every book about gay dads,” she laughs, “but it’s not the same.”

Lyford’s father and his husband are amazing grandparents, and she wanted her kids to have a book that reflected their reality. “Children need to see themselves in stories,” Lyford says, “That is why we created this book.”

With the help of her father and co-author, Robert Schanke, Lyford has finally made the dream of a children’s book featuring gay grand-

parents a reality. Because the book is based on her family, it was important that everyone in the family was comfortable with the project. “We are lucky to have a wonderfully supportive family,” Lyford smiles.

Part of Lyford’s goal in writing is to challenge readers to think twice before guessing at anyone’s family composition. “I hope this helps to make people stop and think,” she muses, “Be careful what you assume when talking to children about their family unit...I have heard from numerous families who have recently had the same sort of experience at school.” Preconceived notions can and do hurt

Continued on page 34

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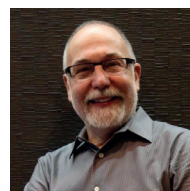
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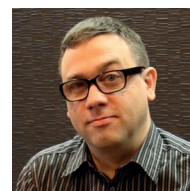
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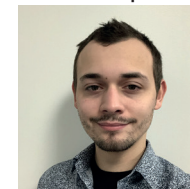


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Provides caregiver support, resource counseling for seniors, home chores for seniors, and Medicare support. 10201 Wayzata Blvd., #335 Minnetonka, MN 55305 (952) 541-1019 www.seniorcommunity.org

SOCIAL SERVICES

Children's Home & LSS

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SPORTS & RECREATION

Minnesota State Parks & Trails

There are 75 Minnesota state parks and recreation areas ready for you to explore! (888) 646-6367 www.mndnr.gov/parks

VOLUNTEERISM

Gay 4 Good

LGBTQ organization making positive impact on our greater community. Volunteering for social & environmental causes. (562) 684-8210 www.gayforgood.org

YOUTH

Face to Face

Supports youth ages 11 to 24 with health care, mental health services, and basic needs services for youth experiencing homelessness. 1165 Arcade St. St. Paul, MN 55106 (651) 772-5555 admin@face2face.org <http://www.face2face.org>

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kids unnecessarily, whether those notions regard the gender, orientation, race, or adoption status of family members. It is always better to give people the space to describe their situation.

Lyford has been an LGBTQ activist for years, lobbying for same sex marriage and giving speeches across Minnesota. In fact, in 2014, *Lavender* honored her with an Organizational Achievement Award. *Katy Has Two Grampas* marks a new chapter for Lyford, in which she merges her activism with children's literature. Her father has been integral to the process, not only being one of the two "grampas" featured in the story, but also by providing a wealth of knowledge from his previous experience writing award-winning biographies.

Katy Has Two Grampas has been five years

in the making – one of those rare projects that actually benefited from the lockdown. "The entire book was written during COVID," Lyford says, "Once we were stuck at home it gave us the time to work on the book." This was especially true for illustrator Mariia Luzina, who was living in Italy at the beginning of the pandemic. With the incredibly restrictive guidelines in place, she "was only able to leave her apartment to walk her dog," Lyford says.

"Both she and our family are huge fans of Hayao Miyazaki...her style has that feel." Luzina's illustrations are delightful, simultaneously cartoonish and photorealistic. "Mariia Luzina was a magician!" Lyford exclaims, "We really love how she was able to tell the story in her images." Luzina even hid a recurring character

every page, making for a fun game of "I spy" while you read.

Like most picture books, *Katy Has Two Grampas* is short, but it is brimming with valuable life lessons. The little tome celebrates familial love, encourages kids to confront their fears, and serves as a reminder that sometimes all you need is a big sister who has your back.

Whether you get a copy for yourself, your children, or your grandchildren, this is a sweet book that will be treasured for years to come.

Lavender readers can use promo code LAV-FORKATY to get free shipping when purchasing the book through the website listed below. *Katy Has Two Grampas* is also available at Mischief on Grand.

For more information check out www.katy-hastwogrampas.com ■

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